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RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 8971
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 4518
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 001143

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SUBJECT: SCO: MFA COY, SECRETARIAT POSITIVE ON IRAN'S BID
FOR FULL MEMBERSHIP

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Classified By: Deputy Political Section Chief Ben Moeling.
Reasons 1.4 (B/D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: A contact at the Chinese Foreign Ministry declined to comment on whether China would support Iran's bid to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), but said there are "ample reasons" for Iran's admission to the organization, including the potential for energy cooperation and improved trade. A contact at the SCO Secretariat was positive about Iran's application to join the group as a full member. Member country capitals are considering the bid, and a decision is expected at the Dushanbe Summit, which may take place in late August. Membership must be approved by all member countries, giving all members a veto on the bid. END SUMMARY.

Secretariat: Decision Expected at August Summit

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12. (C) Asked about press reports that Iran has submitted a formal application for full membership to the SCO, Umad Azizov, an Uzbek diplomat and Senior Expert at the SCO Secretariat, confirmed to PolOff March 26 that Iran has made

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an application. Iran, currently an observer in the SCO, submitted the application to Tajikistan as the current SCO chair, and officials in Tajikistan forwarded the application to member countries for consideration. He reported that a SCO Summit will be held in Dushanbe around the end of August, despite possible complications due to the timing in relation to the Beijing Olympics, and the heads of state would most likely announce a decision at that meeting. (Note: Azizov's strong expectation that the group will quickly move to announce a decision on Iran at this year's summit contrasts with Pakistan's stalled bid for membership. End note.) Foreign ministers would probably meet to consult on the issue 2-3 weeks before the summit to provide recommendations to their leaders. Azizov said that the application must have the support of all member states, giving every existing member a veto. He stressed that in order to become a member,

Iran must sign onto all agreements concluded in the framework of the SCO.

¶3. (C) Azizov said he is personally quite positive about Iran's bid. He stressed there are many advantages for the SCO in accepting Iran as a member, especially given its natural resources and links to the broader Middle East. He added, however, that the Secretariat does not have a role in the decision-making process, and that the heads of state of the member countries will adjudicate the application. The SCO Secretariat does not convene a Working Group to deal with membership determinations, and makes no recommendation.

MFA: Iran Actively Lobbying

¶4. (C) MFA Deputy Director for SCO Affairs Wang Wenli told PolOff March 26 that Iran has expressed interest in joining the SCO as a full member since at least 2006. She confirmed that a decision announcement is likely at the Dushanbe conference later this year, but could not confirm the August timeframe for the Summit that Azizov outlined. She said that in the last year Iran has actively lobbied member countries to support its bid, and has sought to participate proactively in its role as an observer country in SCO activities, particularly those related to energy cooperation. She confirmed that all existing member countries must support Iran's application for it to be approved.

MFA: "Ample Reasons" to Include Iran

¶5. (C) She acknowledged that Iran is on the geographic margins of the current SCO membership, but stressed there are "ample reasons" for Iran's admission to the organization. She cited energy cooperation and trade potential as examples, as well as possible counter-terrorism cooperation and Iran's important influence in the Central Asian region. She declined to comment on whether China would support Iran's

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bid, and stressed that the outcome would be not reached based on the decision of any one country, including China.
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